

THE TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF IBN AṬ-ṬAYYIB:
AN INTERPRETATION OF BABAI THE GREAT'S
METAPHYSICAL SYSTEM IN THE WORLD OF ISLAM

BY
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ABSTRACT

The Trinitarian doctrine of Abū al-Faraġ ‘Abd Allah Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib (10th-11th c.) may be considered a good example of an interpretation of the Trinitarian theology and metaphysical system of Babai the Great (7th c.). Babai made an effort to discern between metaphysical terms, such as: substance (*kyānā*), hypostasis (*qnōmā*), and person (*paršōpā*), making a peculiar mixture of Cappadocian, Nestorian, i.e., East Syrian, and Antiochene theology. Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, however, did not make use of Babai’s terminology. Particularly, although he explained the Trinitarian dogma in a similar way to Babai, he did not apply the term person (*paršōpā*) to the Trinitarian theology. This paper aims to show the importance of the Trinitarian thought of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib. It also answers the following questions: 1) how was he able to make an excellent interpretation of Babai’s thought in the language and ambient of Islam, and 2) why did he consider it the best way to explain the Trinitarian dogma to the Muslims?

INTRODUCTION

The Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocians was the foundation stone for the Trinitarian dogma of the Church. In the first synods of the Church of the East, there are archaic expressions and a particular Trinitarian terminology: God is one nature (*kyānā*) and three hypostases (*qnōmē*). Babai the Great (7th century) introduces an important development in the Trinitarian and Christological doctrine and terminology within the Church of the East. His effort was to discern between such terms as: nature (*kyānā*), hypostasis (*qnōmā*) and person (*paršōpā*), a peculiar mixture of both Cappadocian and Antiochene theology. His philosophical terminology and theological doctrine was officially recognized by his church at the assembly of bishops in 612, but only with respect to its Christological part. As for his philosophical approach to the Trinitarian dogma, it was not totally approved, or we can say that it was neither accepted nor rejected.

In the 10th and 11th centuries, the Trinitarian theology of Abū al-Farağ ‘Abd Allah Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, an important theologian of the Church of the East, can be considered a good example of an interpretation of Babai’s Trinitarian theology. It is worth noting that Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib respected the desire of his church not to apply the term “person” (*paršōpā*) to its Trinitarian theology as Babai did. Rather, he explained the Trinitarian dogma by elaborating on Babai’s metaphysical system from an Aristotelian philosophical context.

This paper aims to present and analyze the metaphysical systems of Babai and Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib in order to determine the common nucleus between the two, and then to analyze the further development of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib. Additionally, it will demonstrate the importance of the Trinitarian thought of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, and his ability to explain the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas in the language and milieu of Islam, using traditional terminology and making an excellent interpretation and modification of Babai’s metaphysical system. It will be also shown that with his elaboration of Babai’s metaphysical system, Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib created his own system. This new and particular metaphysical system was a good way to answer questions posed by the Muslims of his time regarding the Trinitarian dogma.

Before beginning our analysis, we would like to make some terminological remarks. First of all regarding the term *qnōmā*: it is the Syriac translation of the Greek ὑπόστασις, usually translated by scholars as “hypostasis” (at least in a Trinitarian context)¹, although it should be noted that not all

1) Cf. PATROS, “La cristologia”, pp. 29-31.

A. BABAI THE GREAT AND HIS DOCTRINE

Until the year 612, the doctrine of the Church of the East used a certain metaphysical terminology to express Trinitarian and Christological dogmas: 1) God is one nature (*kyānā*) and three hypostases (*qnōmē*), the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; 2) Christ is one person (*paršōpā*) and two natures (*kyānē*), united without division or mixture⁶.

During the Christological discussions within the Church of the East, for ecclesiastical, political and doctrinal reasons, some theologians began to develop metaphysically its Christology. The role of the schools and some monasteries was important in this development⁷. The so-called “controversy of Henanā of Adiabene” was the most significant event which shows the theological discussion within the same church and the direct and indirect contacts between it and the other churches-confessions, i.e., the Chalcedonians and the non-Chalcedonians (Miaphysites)⁸. The most important figure, whose activity as a monk, spiritual leader and theologian had the major influence on the Church of the East and its official doctrine, was Babai the Great⁹.

Babai the Great¹⁰ was born ca. 551 in the area of Beth ‘Aynatha. He became a monk in the “Great Monastery” founded by Abraham of Kaškar (†588)¹¹, to whom he became superior and spiritual leader. After the death of the Catholicos of the Church of the East, mar Grigor (†610)¹², Chosroes II (d. 628), the Sasanian emperor, did not allow the bishops of this church to elect a new Catholicos. Until Chosroes’ death, the church was led by the archdeacon Aba of Seleucia and Babai, who had the appointment of “visitor of the monasteries”. In the year 612, according to the will of Babai, an as-

6) On this topic, see our article EBEID, “The Christology”; see also the following references: BROCK, “The Christology”, pp. 125-142; Sebastian P. BROCK, “The Christology of the Church of the East”, in Dmitry AFINOGENOV & ALEXEY MURAVIEV (ed.), *Traditions and Heritage of the Christian East*, Izdatelstvo, Moscow, 1996, pp. 159-179; PATROS, “La cristologia”, pp. 27-42.

7) In this regard see BECKER, *Fear*.

8) On the controversy of *Hennanā* see CHILDERS, “Henana”, p. 194; BAUM & WINKLER, *The Church*, pp. 35-41; BECKER, *Fear*, pp. 90-91; EBEID, “The Christology”, pp. 377, 389-390, 394-395.

9) Cf. BAUM & WINKLER, *The Church*, p. 38.

10) On Babai, his life and his historical context see BROCK, “Babai the Great”, pp. 49-50; W BAUM & WINKLER, *The Church*, pp. 37-41.

11) On Abraham of Kashkar see Lucas VAN ROMPAY, “Abraham of Kashkar”, in GEDSH, pp. 8-9; Sabino CHIALÀ, *Abramo di Kashkar e la sua comunità. La rinascita del monachesimo siro-orientale*, Qiqajon, Magnano, 2005.

12) On this catholicos see Lucas VAN ROMPAY, “Grigor I”, in GEDSH, p. 183.

sembly of bishops was held, which adopted a new Christological formula: Christ is one person (*paršōpā*) in which were united, without mixture or separation, two natures (*kyānē*) and two hypostases (*qnōmē*)¹³.

Certainly, this was the contribution of the metaphysical development that Babai made and expressed in his “Book of the Union”¹⁴, which we will briefly present in this paper. It is to be noted that Babai’s theological system was adopted partly by the assembly of 612. This does not mean that his metaphysical system, especially regarding his Trinitarian thought, was totally rejected or was not used by others¹⁵. The main part of our paper here, in fact, will focus on how Ibn at-Ṭayyib used and interpreted Babai’s metaphysical system to explain the Trinitarian doctrine to Muslims.

1. Babai the Great’s metaphysical system

Going back to Babai’s metaphysical system, we should always keep in mind that in the internal Christological discussion among the theologians and thinkers of the Church of the East there were questions regarding the two natures of Christ and their real union. If Christ is one person with two united natures, and these natures maintain their properties, should we consider the union real or not? In addition, the presence of the Miaphysites (Jacobites) into the Sasanian land, and their propaganda against the traditional doctrine of the Church of the East considering it a dualistic Christology and accusing it to be real Nestorianism, i.e., the doctrine of two separated subjects in Christ, had made a group of theologians of this church refute any non-dualistic Christological formula or proposal. They considered such doctrines a betrayal of the faith of the Church, that is, in Christ the united natures are perfect and each one conserves its natural properties.

For that reason, the Christological proposal of Henanā that Christ is one person (*paršōpā*), one hypostasis (*qnōmā*) and two natures (*kyānē*)¹⁶ was

13) Cf. BAUM & WINKLER, *The Church*, p. 39.

14) This work was edited and translated into Latin by VASCHALDE, *Babai Magni*.

15) The Christological controversy within the Church of East did not end with the assembly of 612. On this see our article, Bishara EBEID, “La cristologia del *catholicos* Mar Georgis I. Un’analisi della sua lettera a Mina”, in Rafal ZARZECZNY (ed.), *Aethiopia Fortitudo Ejus. Studi in onore di Monsignor Osvaldo Raineri in occasione del suo 80° compleanno* (OCA 298), Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Roma, 2015, pp. 203-220; see also Bishara EBEID, “Christology and Deification in the Church of the East. Mar Gewargis I, His Synod and His Letter to Mina as a Polemic against Martyrius-Sahdona” in *Cristianesimo nella Storia* (Studies in History, Theology and Exegesis) 38:3 (2017), pp. 729-784.

16) Cf. CHILDERS, “Henana”, p. 194.

seen as dangerous to some of the theologians and thinkers of the Church of the East. In fact, they tried to conserve their different Christological identity from the Chalcedonians and the non-Chalcedonians (Jacobites)¹⁷.

Babai, against such voices as the one of Henanā, wrote his “Book of the Union”, and was one of the important theologians of the Church of the East to develop systematically the Trinitarian and Christological doctrine of his church, according to his point of view. He actually defined the technical and metaphysical terms used in these doctrines, giving them a clear explanation and a precise metaphysical role and use¹⁸.

There is no doubt that the concept of nature (*kyānā*) was not a topic of discussion since there was already an agreement on its definition that it was the general and common substance (*itūtā/usiā*)¹⁹. The problem, however, was regarding the definition of the terms hypostasis (*qnōmā*) and person (*parṣōpā*), their relation to the common nature (*kyānā*), and the one between each other.

According to Babai, a singular substance (usiā/οὐσία) is called:

hypostasis (*qnōmā*), consisting in its single essence [expressed] by the number 'one'. And it is distinct from the 'many' [hypostases], not because of the fact that it became singular, but since it receives, in the created, rational and free beings, various accidents of virtue of abundance or of poverty, of knowledge or of ignorance; and in the irrational beings receives also various accidents, either by opposed temperaments or in any other way. And these [the accidents], as I said, are not creators, they are only created [things]. Hypostasis is fixed according to its nature and it is subject to the species and the nature of which it is hypostasis, together with the similar hypostases to it [i.e. of the same nature]. It is distinguished from these similar and equal hy-

[illegible]

17) Cf. BAUM & WINKLER, *The Church*, pp. 35-41; see EBEID, "The Christology", pp. 377, 389-390, 394-395.

18) Cf. BAUM & WINKLER, *The Church*, p. 38.

19) Cf. PATROS, "La cristologia", pp. 28-29.

thought. Gabriel and Michael, Paul and Peter are *qnōmē*, but also are *parsōpē*. In the following citation, Babai further explains his system:

The person (*parōpā*) is the property of any [possible] hypostasis, which distinguishes it from other [hypostases], because the hypostasis of Paul is not the hypostasis of Peter. Although they [i.e. Paul and Peter or any other humans] are equal in nature and hypostasis—for each of them possesses a body and a soul, they is living, and rational and corporeal—nevertheless in person they are distinct from each other, either in age, appearance, health, wisdom, power, paternity, filiation, being male or female, or any other way that distinguishes and manifests the singular and individual property. [As a consequence], this one is not that one, nor is those these. Although in nature they are identical, [nevertheless] in the [domain] of the singular property that this hypostasis possesses, which is not that one, it is the person that makes the distinction.²²

[illegible]

In this definition we should notice that for Babai, the *qnōmā* has two kinds of properties and characteristics, the natural and the proper. By the natural, it is recognized to which common being it belongs. By the individual, it is distinguished from the other hypostases (*qnōmē*) of the same species and general substance. In our opinion, for Babai, the *qnōmā* by itself, being a singular and concrete substance of a general nature, is a perfect manifestation of the natural properties of this species, however, to be recognized as individuality, i.e., a particular reality, it receives a person (*paršōpā*), that is, a group of individual properties. One can notice that for our thinker, the general nature, in fact, does not exist. It is an abstract reality, while the concrete one is the subsistent reality, the singular and concrete substance, the *qnōmā*. However, this subsistent reality cannot be complete without the individual properties, which is the person that each *qnōmā* possesses. The person of one hypostasis, i.e., reality composed by *qnōmā* and *paršōpā*, in conclusion, is a concrete, perfect and complete singular nature recognized so by its natural (*qnōmā*), and personal (*paršōpā*) properties²⁴.

22) The translation is ours.

23) VASCHALDE, *Babai Magni*, p. 160.

24) For more details regarding Babai's thought and doctrine of these terms see SCIPIONI, *Ricerche*, pp. 110-112; ABRAMOWSKI, "Babai", pp. 297-314.

Making this analysis we can, in fact, notice that Babai is developing his metaphysical system, having as its basis, not only the philosophy of stoicism regarding the categories of “κοινῶς ποιός” and “ιδίως ποιόν”, as Scipioni sustained²⁵, but also the Aristotelian concept of substance “οὐσία”, the primary and the secondary. In our opinion, it is an elaboration and development of what we already find in Gregory of Nyssa’s metaphysical system, i.e., the concept of the “partial substance” (μερικὴ οὐσία) or “particular substance” (ιδικὴ οὐσία)²⁶. It is not our purpose to enter into detail regarding the doctrine of Gregory of Nyssa or the other Cappadocians²⁷, but we think that Babai had as a basis an existing elaboration of that metaphysical system, already in use by other Antiochene thinkers and theologians²⁸. However, Babai gave it a new dimension, which we may call “Nestorian”.

According to the elaborated system that Babai had as a basis, we can say that the secondary substance is the common and general, the universal. It is an abstract nature, while the primary substance is the singular nature with the individual properties. It is the common nature which takes an existence in individuals. There is, however, another status or category of substance, the partial one, which is an intermediate status between the abstract reality (common and general) and the concrete one (individual and singular).

Babai applied the terminology he had to this metaphysical system. For the general and common, i.e., the secondary substance and the “κοινῶς ποιός”, he used “substance” (مادة), “nature” (طبيعة), and “essence” (جوهر). This category is the group of the natural properties of one species, it is an abstract reality. When this abstract reality comes into existence and is distinct numerically, it is called hypostasis (فرد). The singular substance is one of many that are subject to one specific species and common

25) Cf. SCIPIONI, *Ricerche*, pp. 136-137.

26) Cf. TURCESCU, *Gregory*, pp. 26-38, especially pp. 37-38, and pp. 69-71.

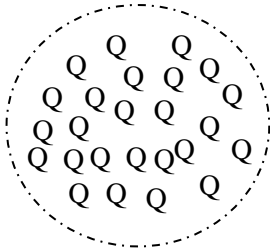
27) In addition to the reference in the previous footnote, see also KARIATLIS, “St Basil’s”, pp. 57-83; TURCESCU, “Prosopon”, pp. 374-395; HILDEBRAND, *The Trinitarian*.

28) We think, as Scipioni demonstrated, that Nestorius’ Liber Heraclides, including Pseudo-Nestorius, used such a system, cf. SCIPIONI, *Ricerche*, pp. 98-158, 153-158. Regarding the Antiochene background of Babai, see ABRAMOWSKI, “Babai”, pp. 328-341. In addition, in our view, Leontius of Byzantium, who had an Antiochene education and formation, used a similar system and applied it to the Chalcedonian Christology. Regarding his system, see KRAUSMÜLLER, Dirk, “Making Sense of the Formula of Chalcedon. The Cappadocians and Aristotle in Leontius of Byzantium’s *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*”, in *Vigiliae Christianae* 65 (2011), pp. 484-513. We are, in fact, planning to further investigate this topic in order to demonstrate the common Antiochene metaphysical system of both Babai and Leontius. The former gave it a “Nestorian” dimension while the latter gave it a Chalcedonian dimension.

two *qnōmē* with their *paršōpē*. It is not the general nature with the property or the idiom that make the hypostasis, as it is for the Cappadocians, but it is the hypostasis (*qnōmā*), as concrete singular substance of a general nature, with the property that make the person (*paršōpā*). It is clear that *qnōmā* and *paršōpā* are two different metaphysical concepts with different functions. In these last affirmations we notice not only the differentiation between Babai and the Cappadocians, but also that for Babai there is a difference between idiom, and property (ܐܝܕܡܐ), and person (ܐܢܫܐ).

It may be argued that the *paršōpā* manifests the personal properties of one *qnōmā*. One can also observe, however, that sometimes the difference between these two concepts is blurred. The clearest example of this is the explanation that Babai gives regarding the names. For him, the names “Father”, “Son”, and “Holy Spirit” are the persons, and at the same time they are the individual properties of the *qnōmē*. For this reason, he affirms that “the name ‘Father’ is the person (*paršōpā*) of his hypostasis” (ܐܢܫܐ ܕܐܒܝ ܐܝܕܡܐ ܕܩܢܕܡܐ). We can explain it also by the following: the person (*paršōpā*) is called “Son” since his *qnōmā* received the property of sonship, i.e., being generated from the Father. This means that the *paršōpā* is an idiom of the *qnōmā*. We can also say that the name of one *paršōpā* indicates the property of its *qnōmā*, and is consequently its personal property.

To make all of this more comprehensible, we will use the following schemes:



An abstract substance of specific species includes a mass of *qnōmē* (hypostases), i.e., singular subsistent substances; each one perfectly manifests the common substance, that is, its natural properties.

$$Q + \text{Individual properties} = P$$

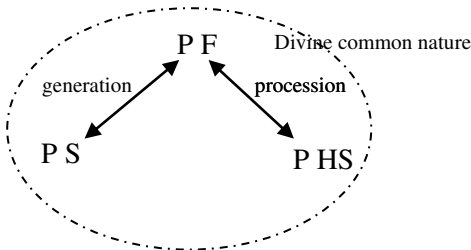
Personalization or individualization of a singular substance: a *qnōmā* with a group of individual properties and idioms becomes a *paršōpā*, i.e., singular subsistent substance that manifests perfectly its natural and personal properties.

$$DQ + \text{Being unbegotten} = PF$$

$$DQ + \text{generation} = PS$$

$$DQ + \text{procession} = PHS$$

A divine *qnōmā* with the individual properties of unbegottenness is the *paršōpā* of the Father. The *paršōpā* of the Son is a divine *qnōmā* with the property of generation, while the one of the Holy Spirit is a divine *qnōmā* with the property of procession.



The Father is the cause of the Trinity. The Son and the Holy Spirit are perfect divine *qnōmē* from the perfect divine *qnōmā* of the Father. They are recognized by their *paršōpē* because of their relation with the Father, i.e., their personal property that comes from their relation with their cause.

3. Babai the Great's Christological approach

Babai was not interested in developing his metaphysical system for the purpose of explaining the Trinitarian doctrine. For him, the Christological dogma was the most important issue. His system helped him to support the doctrine regarding the two natures and two hypostases in Christ united in one person. He said, in fact, as we have seen above, that the *qnōmā* is fixed and cannot be received or given, while the *paršōpā* can be received or given. By this, he is trying to prepare the way for his Christological doctrine: the *paršōpā* of the Son was given to the human *qnōmā* of Christ, and so this human *qnōmā* received or acquired its personalization; and in this *paršōpā*

the union was realized. We have, as a consequence, one person of Christ, which is a common *paršōpā* of two *qnōmē*³².

This system was adopted partially by the synod of 612. That assembly of bishops considered the doctrine regarding the two *qnōmē* in Christ to be orthodox. Regarding the Trinitarian dogma, however, and the use of Babai's system in the Trinitarian field, especially applying the concept of *paršōpā*, it was not officially accepted³³. This is probably because there was either a danger of it being understood as tritheism, or simply that at the time, the problem was not Trinitarian but Christological.

With the arrival of Islam in the Near East, the Trinitarian dogma took its place once again within theological discussions, but this time between Christians and Muslims. For the latter, actually, this dogma meant polytheism. The Christians felt the necessity to re-produce apologetic works in order to cope with this new situation³⁴. Babai's system was not utilized in the Trinitarian field during his time because there was no need for it. However, Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, in the new Islamic milieu, tried to explain the Trinitarian dogma to Muslims by further developing Babai's system, while keeping in mind that it was not officially accepted by his church.

B. IBN AṬ-ṬAYYIB AND HIS DOCTRINE

We do not have much biographical information regarding Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib's date of birth. Scholars, however, claim that it was in the last quarter of the 10th century³⁵. Regarding the date of his death, the Jacobite Barhebraeus (†1286) states that Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib died on October of the year 1043.

32) Regarding the Christology of Babai, see SCIPIONI, *Ricerche*, pp. 112-116, 118-130, 138-148; ABRAMOWSKI, "Babai", pp. 297-314; Luise ABRAMOWSKI, "Die Christologie Babais des Grossen", in *Symposium Syriacum I* (OCA 197), Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Roma 1972, pp. 219-244; Marijke METSELAAR, "The Mirror, the Qnoma, and the Soul: Another Perspective on the Christological Formula of Babai the Great", in *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 19 (2015), pp. 331-366.

33) Cf. CHABOT, *Synodicon*, pp. 564-567 (for the Trinitarian and Christological doctrine), pp. 583-584 (regarding the orthodoxy of this doctrine), see also BAUM & WINKLER, *The Church*, p. 39.

34) A very good reference on this remains the book of Sidney GRIFFITH, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque. Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, Princeton University Press, Princeton-Oxford, 2008, especially pp. 1-11, 23-105. See also HADDAD, *La Trinité*, pp. 25-26.

35) For more details on his life, see FAULTLESS, "Ibn al-Ṭayyib", pp. 667-674; GRAF, *GCAL*, vol. II, pp. 160-162.

He is one of the most important “Nestorian” thinkers of his time, and maybe the most important and greatest polymath of the Church of the East. He was a physician, philosopher and theologian; he wrote many works on medicine, commentaries on most of the works of Aristotle, Galen and Hippocrates, exegetical works on most of the books of Holy Scripture and dogmatic treatises, especially regarding Trinitarian dogma. Being a polymath and a great theologian afforded him the position of secretary to two Catholicoi of the Church of the East: Yūḥannā VII (1012-1020 or 1013-1022) and Elias I (1028-1049). Having taken the responsibility of approving the dogmatic works of “Nestorian” authors and theologians of his time, such as Elias of Nisibis, means that he was considered a theologian and teacher of the Church of the East in that period.

Samir Khalil Samir also demonstrated in his article, “La place d’Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib dans la pensée arabe”, the importance of our author among the Arab thinkers and philosophers, both Muslim and Christian. The different citations that Samir uses confirm all that we have mentioned previously regarding the position of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib as an Aristotelian philosopher and commentator, and as a theologian and approver of theological works³⁶. The fact that some of his works are cited by the encyclopedia “*Mağmū‘ uṣūl al-dīn – Summa of the principles of religion*”³⁷ of the Coptic theologian al-Mu’taman Ibn al-‘Assāl († after 1265)³⁸, proves that his doctrine was admired by authors of other Christian confessions and was greatly useful to them, even if he belonged to a “heretical” church according to their beliefs³⁹.

He is also considered to be the last Christian Aristotelian teacher working in Baghdad⁴⁰. In his exegesis, he follows the Antiochene School, especially, the thought of Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, Ephraim the Syrian and others⁴¹. Scholars note that he explains the Trinitarian dogma

36) Cf. Samir Kh. SAMIR, “La place d’Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib dans la pensée arabe”, in *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 58 (2006), pp. 177-193.

37) There is a critical edition of this work with Italian translation see al-Mu’taman Ibn al-‘Assāl, *Summa*.

38) Cf. FAULTLESS, “Ibn al-Ṭayyib”, p. 671.

39) Some of his works, such as his commentary on the prologue to John, when copied by non-Nestorians received some changes in their content because of the Christological disagreements between them. For more on this, FAULTLESS, “The two Recensions”, pp. 177-198. See also HADDAD, *La Trinité*, p. 73.

40) Cf. FAULTLESS, “Ibn al-Ṭayyib”, p. 668.

41) Cf. FAULTLESS, “Ibn al-Ṭayyib”, p. 669, regarding his exegesis see the following articles: Paul FÉGHALI, “Ibn Aṭ-Ṭayyib et son commentaire sur la Genèse”, in *ParOr* 16 (1990-1991), pp. 149-162; Floris SEPMEIJER, “Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s Commentary on Mathew 1-9: 32-34”,

to Muslims without mentioning their names, using Aristotelian philosophy and the discussion on the attributes of God⁴². Our objective here is to present his Trinitarian doctrine and to demonstrate that he was a disciple, maybe indirectly, of Babai's philosophical system. In our opinion, he elaborated such system and used it in his doctrine, taking into consideration the new conditions of the Christians of that period and region: the Arabic language and the Islamic general context.

To accomplish this, we will use the following edited works⁴³ of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib⁴⁴:

- a. Treatise on the Trinity (*Maqālah fī at-taṭlīl*)⁴⁵.
- b. Treatise on the Trinity and Unity (*Maqālah fī at-taṭlīl wa-t-tawḥīd*)⁴⁶.
- c. Discourse on the Union (*al-Kalām fī al-ittiḥād*)⁴⁷.
- d. Work in fourteen chapters (Arabic title is unknown)⁴⁸.
- e. Treatise on the Union (*Kitāb al-ittiḥād*)⁴⁹.

1. Terminology and metaphysical definitions

Before we look at or examine the Trinitarian doctrine of our author, we should present two of his quotations that illustrate his metaphysical system, which is based on Babai's system as will be made clear by our analysis:

in *ParOr* 25 (2000), pp. 557-564. See also FAULTLESS, "The two Recensions".

42) Cf. FAULTLESS, "Ibn al-Ṭayyib", p. 670.

43) We follow the English titles suggested by FAULTLESS, "Ibn al-Ṭayyib", pp. 674-697. In the same pages, there is a list of the works of Ibn al-Ṭayyib related to the Muslim-Christian dialogue. Another list of his works is offered in GRAF, *GCAL*, vol. II, pp. 162-177.

44) Unfortunately we do not have complete critical editions of all the works of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib. Although we have editions of some works, they are not always critical, but based on just one manuscript. For this reason and in order to have a clearer image of his thought, we need a complete critical edition of all the works attributed to him. These critical editions would ensure the authenticity of his works and might also resolve other important issues regarding his doctrine.

45) There is an edition with a French translation: Ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Maqālah fī at-taṭlīl*, pp. 74-89.

46) There is an edition with a French translation: Ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Maqālah fī at-taṭlīl wa-t-tawḥīd*, pp. 108-123.

47) There is an edition with a French translation: Ibn al-Ṭayyib, *al-Kalām fī al-ittiḥād*, pp. 144-150.

48) This work came to us by way of the citation provided by al-Mu'taman ibn al-ʿAssāl: Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Work in fourteen chapters*, pp. 275- 277 (ch. 11, par. 92-101); pp. 409-416 (ch. 19, par. 28-51).

49) This work came to us only partially, since it is quoted by al-Mu'taman Ibn al-ʿAssāl: Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Kitāb al-ittiḥād*, pp. 77-78 (ch. 8, par. 126-255).

The terms used by Christians regarding the essence (*dāt*) of the Creator (Glorified and Exalted Be He!), are: substance (*ġawhar*), hypostasis (*uqnūm*), person (*farsūf*)⁵⁰, unity (*tawhīd*), trinity (*taṭlīl*), attributes (*ṣifāt*) and union (*ittiḥād*).

The term **substance** (*ġawhar*) in every **essence** (*dāt*) indicates the absolute nature (*muṭlaq aṭ-ṭabā'i*) in the thing, such as the nature of the human being (*al-insān*) in his persons (*aṣḥāsihi*) and the fire in its persons (*aṣḥāsihā*). If [the essence] becomes particular (*taḥaṣṣaṭ*), through the specification, you name it hypostasis (*uqnūm*), and if the attribute [of the hypostasis] becomes specific (*ta'ayyanat*), you name it [the essence] person (*farsūf wa ṣaḥṣ*). When [the essence] obtains a multitude of descriptions [i.e. attributes], according to one side, it may be considered one, and according to another, many: It is one, from the side of the substance (*ġawhar*), it is, [however], many, from the side of its descriptions [i.e., attributes]⁵¹.

الأسماء المستعملة عند النصارى، في ذات البارئ (سبحانه وتعالى) هي لفظة: جوهر، وأقنوم، وفرصوف، وتوحيد، وتثليث، وصفات، واتحاد.

فاسم الجوهر، في كل ذات، يدل على مطلق الطباع في الشيء، كطبع الإنسان المطلق في أشخاصه، والنار المطلقة في أشخاصه. فإذا تخصصت بصفة سميتها بالتخصيص أقنومًا، وإذا تعينت الصفة سميتها فرصوفًا وشخصًا. وإذا تحصلت لها الأوصاف كانت بوجه واحدًا، وبوجه كثيرًا، فإنها من جهة الجوهر تكون واحدًا، ومن جهة أوصافها تكون كثيرة⁵².

It is notable that for Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, the substance (*ġawhar*) is an abstract essence (*dāt*) and reality. This is the meaning, in fact, behind the expression, “the absolute nature in the thing”. It is the common nature of the persons (*aṣḥāṣ*) of the same essence, and it indicates its species. This abstract reality obtains its existence when it becomes particular (*taḥaṣṣaṭ*). Becoming particular means for our author that the essence obtains an attribute. We think that he means that it manifests its natural properties, and in this case it could be called hypostasis (*uqnūm*). In our opinion, we have a kind of identification between the natural properties and the hypostasis. It means that the hypostasis is the perfect manifestation of the natural properties of one species in a singular substance. When this singular substance, i.e., natural properties, obtains specific attributes and descriptions, it becomes a person (*farsūf /ṣaḥṣ*). This is the only text that we read among the works of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib in which the term *farsūf* (*parṣōpā*) was found. He identified it with the term *ṣaḥṣ*, which is used more often to refer to the same metaphysical category⁵³.

50) It is an Arabic transliteration of the Syriac term *parṣōpā* (ܩܪܫܐܘܬܐ), which also may be read as *farsōfā*.

51) The translation is ours.

52) Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Work in fourteen chapters*, p. 275 (ch. 11, par. 93-94).

53) Cf. HADDAD, *La Trinité*, p. 176. See also Bo HOLMBERG, “‘Person’ in the Trinitari-

Our author, then, uses the three different categories that Babai developed in his system. Considering these three categories as three statuses of substances confirms our opinion that behind this system there are the three types of natures: the abstract, the concrete and the intermediate. In addition, we can note that he tries to apply the Cappadocian⁵⁴ doctrine regarding the meaning of hypostasis: a general and common nature with a specific idiom⁵⁵.

Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib gives an example to his readers in order to make it clearer. This example is taken from a quotation in the 13/14th century ms. Vatican Arab. 36, which is attributed to our author with the title “The difference between the substance and the hypostasis”:

“The difference between the substance (ḡawhar) and hypostasis (qnūm) and person (šaḥṣ), attributed to him [to Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib] (May God be pleased with him!).

الفرق بين الجوهر والقنوم والشخص له [ابن الطيب]، رضي الله عنه.

The substance (ḡawhar) is the indication of the **essence**, absolutely, as we say “human being”.

الجوهر دلالة الذات على الإطلاق، كقولنا الإنسان.

And the hypostasis (uqnūm) is the indication of it [the **essence**] when it becomes, with vagueness, particular (taḥaṣṣaṣat) as we say “a man” or “a woman”.

والقنوم دلالة عليها اذا تَحَصَّصَتْ بإِبهام، كقولنا رجل ما وامرأة ما.

And the person (šaḥṣ) is the indication of it [the **essence**] when it becomes, with pureness, particular (taḥaṣṣaṣat), as we say Moses and Mary⁵⁶.

والشخص دلالة عليها اذا تَحَصَّصَتْ بتفصيح، كقولنا موسى ومريم⁵⁷.

First of all, we notice that our author is following the three metaphysical categories that Babai developed. Even if these three categories are different amongst each other, they are related to each other in some way, they are three statuses of the essence. The hypostasis (uqnūm) is a singular nature

an Doctrine of Christian Arabic Apologetics and Its Background in the Syriac Church Fathers”, in *Studia Patristica* 25 (1993), pp. 300-307.

54) That our author knew very well the doctrine of the Cappadocians, especially the one of Basil the Great, is confirmed by the numerous citations and references to his thought that he makes in his commentary on Genesis, see for example Ibn Aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Commentaire*, p. 7; this reference to Basil, in addition, is related to Basil’s doctrine on the Trinity.

55) We find an affirmation of this in his work, “in fourteen chapters”, see Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Work in fourteen chapters*, p. 217 (ch. 8, par. 239): «... الأَقْنُومُ هو الجَوْهَرُ بِصِفَةِ ...»; He also gives the same definition in Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Maqālah fi at-taṭlīl*, p. 109: «... لِأَنَّ الْأَقْنُومَ لَيْسَ هُوَ أَكْثَرُ مِنْ ...». «مجتمع الذات مع الصفة...».

56) The translation is ours.

57) *Vat. ar. 36*, f. 138^v.

without clear specification, i.e., without personal properties, or let us use the expression “without personalization”. If the general and common substance is the human being, its singular natures are men and women. Simply, men and women are the perfect manifestation of the natural characteristics and attributes of the common essence. They indicate that this singular hypostasis belongs to the species of “human being”.

When, however, each singular nature, i.e., hypostasis, obtains specific attributes and properties, it becomes a person (*ṣaḥṣ*). Therefore, we can say that we have different singular natures, the difference being indicated in the particularity of each singular nature, so that one may be called Moses and the other Mary. We think that the key for understanding the thought of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib is his use of the word “*taḥaṣṣaṣat*”, which is a verbal form of the term “*ḥāṣṣah*”, property.

This supports our claim that for our author hypostasis (*uqnūm*) and person (*ṣaḥṣ*) are two different kinds of properties and attributes⁵⁸, being natural and particular. Here, in fact, is the explanation of the expressions “vague-ness” and “pureness”. Another thing we should note in this citation is the non-use of the term *farṣūf*. This, in our opinion, is because, in contrast with its synonym *ṣaḥṣ*, the term *farṣūf* did not enter the Arabic philosophical lexicon. Finally, this citation illustrates that these three categories are the three kinds of natures developed by the elaboration of Aristotle’s doctrine on the substance with the one of stoicism.

2. Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib’s metaphysical system and Trinitarian dogma

How could Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib apply this system to his Trinitarian doctrine? We must take into consideration that when he writes about the Trinity, he

58) In his work “in fourteen chapters” our author affirms this opinion by clearly stating that the hypostasis is one substance with a property, while the person is substances with many properties. It is clear that he is developing his doctrine dealing with the Christological issue, so he is talking about substances in one person. What interests us is the fact that hypostasis and person are identified with two different kinds of properties and attributes, see Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Work in fourteen chapters*, p. 218 (ch. 8, par. 244): «هذا القول قول من لا يفهم الفرق بين...» «الأقنوم والشخص، والأقنوم جوهر بصفة واحدة، والشخص جواهر كثيرة بصفات...». In the same work we notice, as we did with Babai, that this identification means simply a manifestation of the attributes and properties, so the person manifests the personal attributes, and through its hypostasis manifests the natural properties, see Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Work in fourteen chapters*, p. 219 (ch. 8, par. 246): «... على هذا المذهب يبطل فعل أقنوم الإنسان، وهو الأكل والسعي والتعب، وقد وصف المسيح بها، ويبطل...» «فعل أقنوم الإله، وهو إحياء الموتى، وقد وصف المسيح بها...».

has his opponents specifically in mind, i.e., the Muslims⁵⁹. This means that in applying his metaphysical system, he must be careful not to be understood as a tritheist. In addition, we will notice that he uses Muslim language and doctrine, especially in the discussion on the divine attributes.

He said: “The Church believes that the Creator is one substance (*ḡawhar*) and He is described by three attributes (*ṣifāt*), and it believes that He is described by three hypostases (*aqānīm*)...”.

قال البيعة تعتقد ان البارئ جوهر واحد موصوف بصفات ثلاث وتعتقد فيه بأنه يوصف بثلاثة أقانيم ...

And the substance indicates the essence (*dāt*) of the sublime Creator, which, as it is demonstrated, is one; and the attributes indicate existing meanings of this essence, and [they] are not subsistent essences (*dawāt qā'imah binuḡfūsihā*); they are the “paternity”, the “filiation” and the “procession”. And the hypostasis (*uqnūm*) indicates the result of the essence with each one of the attributes. So when the essence is taken with the meaning of paternity, the result is called “Father”, when the same [essence] is taken with the meaning of the filiation [it] is called “Son”, and when it is taken with the meaning of the procession [it] is called “Holy Spirit”...⁶⁰

والجوهر يشار به الى ذات البارئ تعالى التي قد بان أنها واحدة والصفات يشار بها الى معان موجودة لهذه الذات لا ذوات قائمة بنفوسها هي أبوة وبنوة وانبعث، والأقنوم يشار به الى مجتمع الذات مع كل واحدة من الصفات فان الذات اذا أخذت مع معنى الأبوة قيل في المجتمع انه أب واذا أخذت بعينها مع معنى البنوة قيل فيها انها ابن واذا أخذت مع معنى الانبعث قيل فيها انها روح القدس ...⁶¹

From the first affirmation we notice that for Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib the uniqueness of God is to be found in the fact that the divine nature is one: God is one according to his substance (*ḡawhar*), which is his essence (*dāt*). The second thing we should note is that this one essence is described by three attributes (*ṣifāt*) and by three hypostases (*aqānīm*). Does our author limit the metaphysical function of hypostasis to describing the general essence? If the answer is yes, does he identify hypostasis with the attribute?

In the same citation above, it is clear that the attributes, which are also called “meanings” (*ma'ānī*), are not subsistent essences (*dawāt*). This means that the attributes are not identified with hypostases (*aqānīm*), which are essences as he claimed in his metaphysical system above. As a consequence, when Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib mentions that the divine essence is described by three

59) As we said, our author never mentions Muslims in his works, although it is clear that he writes apologetically to them as we will demonstrate in our analysis, see also FAULTLESS, “*Ibn al-Ṭayyib*”, p. 670.

60) The translation is ours.

61) Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Maqālah fī at-taṭlīl wa-t-tawḥīd*, p. 109.

attributes and three *aqānīm*, he is intending two different metaphysical categories. The attributes, in fact, according to our text, are the “paternity”, the “filiation” and the “procession”. This causes or leads us to argue that for him the attributes in Trinitarian doctrine are the idioms of the persons (*ašḥāṣ*) of his metaphysical system⁶².

As for Babai, “person” for Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib is the idiom of the Cappadocians, and in our case is called attribute (*ṣifah*). It is the group of the personal and individual properties of each singular substance. Attention, however, should be placed on Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib’s approach to the Cappadocian system, and how he modifies Babai’s system and applies it. He does not use the metaphysical term person (*farṣūfīṣahṣ*), even though it is used in his general metaphysical doctrine, as we have seen above. For him, the Father is already a specific hypostasis, i.e., hypostasis with an attribute, which is the meaning of the paternity. For Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib the Cappadocian affirmation that the essence with an idiom forms the hypostasis is accepted under one condition: this general essence with the attribute makes not just any hypostasis, but a specific one. According to his metaphysical system, this hypostasis is a person, i.e., a singular subsistent substance individualized and personalized. In other words, it makes a particular substance⁶³.

If the three divine *aqānīm* are known and recognized as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, this means that they are already specific *aqānīm*, that is, hypostases with their persons (individual attributes of paternity, filiation and procession). The divine essence is one, but it is an abstract concept; it obtains its existence through the hypostases. These hypostases, however, are with their attributes, because they exist with the relation between them, i.e., they are cause and caused⁶⁴. The following scheme further clarifies this point:

62) Regarding the difference between hypostasis and person according to our author, see HADDAD, *La Trinité*, pp. 150, 157.

63) See also a comment on this in HADDAD, *La Trinité*, p. 154.

64) See also his *Maqālah muḥtaṣarah fī al-aqānīm wa-l-ḡawhar wa anna al-fī’l li-l-ḡawhar*, “Brief treatise on the hypostases and substance, and the fact that action pertains to the substance”, edited twice, once by Gérard Troupeau and the second time by Samir Khalil Samir, cf. FAULTLESS, «*Ibn al-Ṭayyib*», 694. We were not able to read and check either of these editions, but since this work exists in one manuscript only, Vat. ar. 145, ff. 70^v-73^v, we were able to read the manuscript and check the text of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib.

Father	=	Hypostasis of the Father	=	Divine essence with the attribute of pater- nity (person of the Father)	=	Hypostasis (divine subsistent substance)	+	Person (attribute of paternity)
Son	=	Hypostasis of the Son	=	Divine essence with the attribute of filia- tion (person of the Son)	=	Hypostasis (divine subsistent substance)	+	Person (attribute of filiation)
Holy Spirit	=	Hypostasis of the Holy Spirit	=	Divine essence with the attribute of pro- cession (person of the Holy Spirit)	=	Hypostasis (divine subsistent substance)	+	Person (attribute of procession)

The Father is the divine essence subsisting and recognized by a specific attribute, it is a hypostasis with a person. The Son is recognized as Son because of his relation to the Father; He is caused by the hypostasis of the Father, who is a divine particular essence, so He is also divine particular essence, (divine hypostasis). However, being caused by the Father, i.e., the inter-trinitarian relation, He has his attribute eternally, that is, the person of filiation. As a consequence, He is recognized to be Son, hypostasis and person. We can say the same about the Holy Spirit.

In his “Treatise on the Trinity and Unity”, Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib declares that the result of the essence and the attribute is a specific hypostasis, i.e., hypostasis with person. Before we cite the text in which he mentions this doctrine, we need to underline the fact that in his apologetic works regarding Trinitarian dogma, he develops Trinitarian analogy, as all Arab-Christian theologians do. He chose the one of “knowledge” (*‘ilm*), “knower” (*‘ālim*), and “known” (*ma’lūm*)⁶⁵. For him, these are three attributes that characterize the divine essence. This essence has the “knowledge”, i.e., the Father, this essence knows itself, so it is “knower”, i.e., the Son, and it is also “known” to itself, i.e., the Holy Spirit⁶⁶. It is clear that to develop such an analogy, he

65) Cf. HADDAD, *La Trinité*, p. 228.

66) Cf. Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Maqālah fī at-taṭlīṭ*, p. 81: « فنقول ان النصارى تعتقد أن ذات البارئ واحدة... وتعتقد أيضاً أن هذه الذات هي ذات لها صفة العلم، تعالت على أن تكون على ضد هذه الصفة، والذات التي تكون بصفة العلم شأنها أن تعلم فذات البارئ تعالى شأنها أن تعلم فهي تعلم ذاتها وإذا كانت تعلم ذاتها فذاتها قد ثبت أن ذات البارئ تعالى موجودة وأنها واحدة، ومعلوم أن هذه الذات لا تخلو أن تكون بصفة: « see also Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Maqālah fī at-taṭlīṭ wa-t-tawḥīd*, p. 113: « العالمين العاقلين أو لا وحوشيت من القسم الثاني فبقي أن تكون لها صفة العالمين العاقلين لأنه محال أن يكون خالق العلوم والعقول غير عالم ولا عاقل، وإذا كانت بهذه الصفة فلها قوة ان تعلم ذاتها وذاتها إحدى المعلومات وهي تعلم ذاتها فتكون

of the essence (*dār*) with the attribute (*ṣifah*); and since the attributes (*ṣifāt*) are three, if the essence is taken with each one of them, the result is one hypostasis (*uqnūm*). As a consequence, the Creator is one and many; one, from the side of the essence (*dār*) and many from the side of the hypostases (*aqānīm*)⁶⁹.

الصفة، ولأن الصفات ثلاث. فإذا أخذت الذات مع كل واحدة منها كان ذلك أقنومًا فيكون الباري تعالى واحدًا وكثيرًا واحدًا من قبل الذات كثيرًا من قبل الأقانيم⁷⁰.

The last sentence, in fact, is similar to the one of his metaphysical rules presented above. Here we present a comparison:

When [the essence] obtains a multitude of descriptions [i.e. attributes], according to one side, it could be considered one, and according to another, many. It is one, from the side of the **substance** (*ḡawhar*), it is, [however], many, from the side of its **descriptions** [i.e. **attributes**].

As a consequence, the Creator is one and many; one, from the side of **the essence** (*dār*) and many from the side of **the hypostases** (*aqānīm*).

It is clear, then, that within the Trinitarian field, when our author affirms that the hypostases (*aqānīm*) describe the divine nature and that they are, in some way, identified by attributes, i.e., the individual idioms of each hypostasis (property, *ḥāṣṣah*), he means that these hypostases are eternally with persons, because they came to exist through a relation between them⁷¹.

In our opinion, there are two reasons behind this interpretation and modification of Babai's system: 1) on the one hand, Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib wants to maintain one cause in the Trinity, i.e., the Father as hypostasis and person; 2) on the other hand, he also desires to underline the unity of the three hypostases in the one common essence.

69) The translation is ours.

70) Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Maqālah fī at-taṭlīl wa-t-tawḥīd*, p. 109.

71) For some scholars the Nestorian Church identified hypostasis with attribute, see in the introduction of Robert CASPAR, "Les versions arabes du dialogue entre le Catholicos Timothée I et le Calife al-Mahdī (II^e/VIII^e Siècle) 'Mohammed a suivi la voie des prophètes'", in *Islamocristiana* 3 (1977), 107-175, here 121. But, in fact, this identification must be read under the conditions that our author gives. For example, if here in Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib we do not find a clear identification between hypostasis and attribute, in Elias of Nisibis, a contemporary Nestorian author of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, the hypostases are attributes. Since both authors are of the same church, we think the key for understanding this identification in Elias is the doctrine of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib here. For the Trinitarian doctrine in Elias see EBEID, *La Tunica*, pp. 451-482. Years before Elias, the Coptic bishop Sāwīrūs Ibn al-Muqaffa' identified hypostasis with attribute, but he had a different basis for this identification and, as a result, a different doctrinal outcome, see EBEID, *La Tunica*, pp. 293-307, see also Mark SWANSON, "Are Hypostases Attributes? An investigation into the Modern Egyptian Christian Appropriation of the Medieval Arabic Apologetic Heritage", in *ParOr* 16 (1990-1991), pp. 239-250.

The cause cannot be an abstract reality, but the common nature is abstract. To resolve this problem, he considers the hypostasis a perfect manifestation of the common essence in a singular way that is the common essence with the attribute. The Father in this case is not identified with the abstract common nature, but being the cause, he manifests this common nature perfectly, and the hypostases caused by him also manifest perfectly the common nature. To explain this problem and to resolve it, he again uses the analogy of “knowledge” (*‘ilm*), “knower” (*‘ālim*) and “known” (*ma‘lūm*). Through this analogy he tries to show that the three hypostases as essence are one, co-existing together eternally. Having one cause (Father) and two caused (Son and Spirit) does not mean that this one cause is of the divine essence and its existence. Rather, it is simply cause of itself, i.e., it manifests the inter-trinitarian relations:

And if we say that the Father is cause and the Son and the Spirit are caused, this should not be understood that we mean cause of existence [i.e., creation], because the essence is one numerically.

The Father, however, who is the same essence with the power of knowledge, is the cause of the Son and the Spirit, I mean, the same essence with the [ability] to be knower and known.

It is one essence, a cause of itself, not [as a cause] of [its] existence. If we, [however], comprise the essence of the Creator with the rest of the created beings, it [the divine essence] is cause of their existence [of the created beings] and of their formation and their creation⁷².

ونحن وإن قلنا في الأب انه علة وفي الابن والروح
أنتهما معلولان فلا يفهم منا أنا نريد علة وجود اذ
كانت الذات واحدة بالعدد،

الا أن الأب وهو الذات نفسها مع القوة على
العلم هو علة الابن والروح أعني الذات نفسها في
أن تكون عالمة ومعلومة

فتكون ذاتاً واحدة علة لنفسها لا في الوجود فاما
إذا قسمنا ذات البارئ الى باقي الموجودات سواها
فانها تكون علة لوجودها وكونها واحداً⁷⁴.

In this way, he maintains a differentiation between the three metaphysical categories: essence, hypostasis and person; and at the same time, he tries to be closer to the Cappadocian doctrine and consistent with the official doctrine of his church. He does not have as a basis, as Rachid Haddad claimed, the neoplatonic doctrine⁷⁴. According to us, he is taking an Aristotelian approach to Babai's system⁷⁵.

72) The translation is ours.

73) Ibn at-Tayyib, *Maqālah fī at-tatlīl wa-t-tawhīd*, pp. 119, 121.

74) Cf. HADDAD, *La Trinité*, pp. 243-245.

75) Cf. FAULTLESS, “*Ibn al-Ṭayyib*”, p. 670.

The question that arises from such analysis is why did our author avoid using the term of person (*farsūfīṣahṣ*), even though he applied it as a concept, since he identified it with the attributes and the properties? A quick answer could be that he wanted to be consistent with the official doctrine of his church. The key, however, comes from his historical context and the discussion regarding the divine attributes.

3. Divine attributes and Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib's metaphysical system

One important element of the Christian-Muslim dialogue at the time of our author, and even earlier, was the divine attributes. It was also a dialogical topic among the different Islamic theological and philosophical schools. The question was the following: if the divine attributes are eternal as God is, it means that they co-exist with him and, as a consequence, there is polytheism in God, or as Muslims call it, *ṣirk*⁷⁶.

Having this element in mind, Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, who accepted the metaphysical system of Babai and modified it to explain the Trinitarian doctrine, also developed it through the doctrine on the divine attributes⁷⁷. First of all, his doctrine on the attributes of God consists of the distinction between two kinds of attributes: essential (*ṣifāt dāt*) and verbal (*ṣifāt fi'lta'addī*)⁷⁸. The essential attributes describe the divine essence and the inter-trinitarian relation of the

76) On this topic one can read the second chapter of Harry Austryn WOLFSON, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge-Massachusetts-London 1976, pp. 112-232. See also Harry Austryn WOLFSON, "The Muslim Attributes and the Christian Trinity", in *The Harvard Theological Review* 49 (1956), pp. 1-18; David THOMAS, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Abbasid Era", in Lloyd RIDGEON, ed., *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*, St. Martins' Press, New York, 2001, pp. 78-98; Sidney GRIFFITH, "The Unity and Trinity of God: Christian Doctrinal Development in Response to the Challenge of Islam - An Historical Perspective", in Michael ROOT & James J. BUCKLEY, ed., *Christian Theology and Islam*, James Clarke & Co, Cambridge, 2014, pp. 11-21; Sara HUSSEINI, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought (9th Century C.E.)*, Brill, Leiden, 2014.

77) For a short comment on Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib's doctrine on the divine attributes see FAULTLESS, "Ibn al-Ṭayyib", p. 670; See also HADDAD, *La Trinité*, p. 156.

78) We would like to mention here that in this division of attributes we note the nucleus of the discussion regarding the distinction between essence and energy in God, which was developed during the 11th century in Byzantium. This discussion, however, was based on the doctrine of Basil the Great, cf. Γεώργιος ΜΑΡΤΖΕΛΟΣ, *Ουσία και Ενέργειαι του Θεού κατά τον Μέγαν Βασίλειον. Συμβολή εις την ιστορικοδογματικήν διερευνήσιν της περί ουσίας και ενεργειών του Θεού διδασκαλίας της Ορθοδόξου Εκκλησίας*, Πουρναράς, Thessaloniki, 1984, pp. 13-26. Again, we then see a Cappadocian influence in our author. However, we think that this topic requires another and more detailed research. See also HADDAD, *La Trinité*, pp. 189-190.

exist in God eternally, so they are in him as «δυνάμει εἶναι» (*bi-l-quwwah*), i.e. He has the power to manifest them. At one specific time, these attributes are manifested as «ἐνέργεια εἶναι» (*bi-l-fiʿl*)⁸³. It is also notable that in this explanation, he is modifying the Cappadocian use of Aristotle's system. They talked about «δυνάμει εἶναι», «ἐνέργεια εἶναι», «εὖ εἶναι», to show that the energy of God is one, and each hypostasis has its own role in manifesting this one energy⁸⁴. For our author, however, the interest is to prove that the verbal attributes exist eternally in God. In conclusion, we can say that for Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib all the attributes are of the divine essence, however, one group describes the essence as it exists, while the other group describes the actions of this essence, either as "power to act" or as "manifestation of the action".

According to Babai's system there are two kinds of properties: the natural and the personal. The hypostasis (*qnōmā*) manifests the natural, that is, the common substance. The person (*paršōpā*) is the group of the individual idioms of one hypostasis, its personalization. Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, on the one hand, wants to maintain Babai's system as a basis of his doctrine, and, on the other hand, has in mind the discussion on God's attributes and their two kinds, which are the essential and the verbal. In our opinion, his desire not to complicate his system so that it could be comprehended by his Muslim readers, and his will to demonstrate that the hypostases are eternal attributes of the divine essence and are not identified with the essence but coexist and describe it, led him to modify Babai's system and to interpret it in a very interesting way.

First of all, he avoids using the term person (*faršūflšahs*) in his Trinitarian doctrine, and we think that he gives the attribute (*ṣifah*) and property (*hāṣṣah*) the metaphysical function of Babai's *paršōpā*, but with some difference. Attribute, in this case, is essential, i.e., it describes the common essence. The result of this description is one specific hypostasis (*uqnūm*). We see, in addition, an approach to the Cappadocians' system, but even in this approach our author departs from it by explaining it in a way we would call an Aristotelian interpretation of Babai's system. The attribute, then, is not exactly as Babai's *paršōpā*, that is, the individual properties of one *qnōmā*.

83) Cf. Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Maqālah fi at-taṭlīl wa-t-tawḥīd*, p. 115: «فالبائى تعالى يوصف بهذه الصفات في القدم على أنها فيه وملكات شأنها أن تفعل، وما تفعله فهو موجود لها في القدم بالقوة أيضاً فان القدرة ما دامت بالقوة فمقدورها بالقوة وإذا فعلت صار مقدورها بالفعل وبعد إيجاد العالم يوصف بأنه حكيم وجواد بالفعل لأن

دامت بالقوة فمقدورها بالفعل وإذا فعلت صار مقدورها بالفعل وبعد إيجاد العالم يوصف بأنه حكيم وجواد بالفعل لأن

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84) Cf. MAPTZEAOΣ, "H évvovα", pp. 72-73.

The attribute for Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib describes the common essence (*dāt*) and forms with it a particular substance, an *uqnūm*. The result in both systems is the same: a specific hypostasis, i.e., a singular substance with personal and individual property.

Although Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib makes this modification, he maintains three different metaphysical categories in his system. He refuses, however, to use the term “person” for the reason of its meaning in the Arabic philosophical lexicon. First of all, the term *farsūf* is not used in such lexicon; the term *ṣaḥṣ*, in fact, is its synonym and replaces it metaphysically. *Ṣaḥṣ* in Arabic means individual, and this concept contains the meaning of division within itself⁸⁵. If Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib would apply it in Trinitarian dogma, as he does in the anthropological field of Christology⁸⁶, the Trinity would be understood as a tritheistic doctrine⁸⁷.

The reasons which led Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib to interpret Babai’s system in this way are now clear. We should pay attention, however, to the fact that when we say that he considers the attributes as essential, he does not understand them as the category of natural properties. They describe the divine essence, but at the same time each attribute gives the essence a different description, giving it a different personalization. His whole purpose is to convey the idea that, since the hypostases include the common essence and different attributes, they describe the common essence through its perfect manifestation in each hypostasis, without, however, underlining that the hypostases are three particular substances of the common species. In this way, the hypostases are not understood to be three divided realities and individuals, which would be tritheism or polytheism. As a result, Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib at the same time tries to follow Babai’s system, to modify it to be in concordance with the official faith of his church, and to elaborate it in order to answer the questions regarding the issues of his time, i.e., the divine attributes. He is a real inter-

85) See in regards the opinion of the Nestorian ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Apologie et Controverses* (coll. “Recherches, Nouvelle Série B”, 5), Arabic text edited by Michel AL-HAYEK, Dār al-maṣriq, Beyrouth, 1977, pp. 161-162.

86) For our author the term *ṣaḥṣ* when it is applied to human beings means a single human nature, i.e., an individual. This is clear in his Christological doctrine as he calls the humanity of Christ the assumed human person (*ṣaḥṣ*), with whom God was united. cf. Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *al-Kalām fī al-ittiḥād*, p. 149: «لأنه ليس من الأشياء المحسوسة وليس يجسم اتخذ شخصاً واتحد به»; see also Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Al-Kalām fī al-ittiḥād*, p. 194 (ch. 8, par 138): «... وهو النبوة التي بها تم الشخص المأخوذ من السيدة...».

87) Cf. HADDAD, *La Trinité*, p. 176; See also FAULTLESS, “*Ibn al-Ṭayyib*”, p. 670. We came to the same conclusion regarding another author of the same church, i.e., Elias of Nsibis. See, EBEID, *La Tunica*, p. 479.

preter, philosopher and theologian of his church.

4. *Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib's Christological approach*

As we said, according to the Christological doctrine of Babai and the official Christology of the Church of the East after the year 612, Christ is the union of two natures and two hypostases. He is the one person of filiation, one Christ and Son. This means that the person of the Son was given to the *qnōmā* of the human being in Christ so that it could be personalized.

We would now like to present very briefly the Christology of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib in order to see how he explains it after having modified Babai's system:

And the belief of this group [Nestorians, Orientals] regarding the union is that the two substances (*al-ḡawharayn*) remain as they are, and the two hypostases (*al-uqnūmayn*) as they are, and the union took place in the property (*ḥāṣṣah*) of the filiation, which is the meaning of knowing the Creator's essence of itself. This person (*ṣahṣ*) [Jesus] chosen from the Lady. [Mary] shared this property (*ḥāṣṣah*) with God, and became from it one Christ, one Son, not one substance (*ḡawhar*) or one hypostasis (*uqnūm*)⁸⁸.

And through these arguments it is demonstrated that Christ, after the union, is two substances (*ḡawharān*) and two hypostases (*uqnūmān*), one Son. The union, then, is in the filiation, [not] in the substance (*ḡawhar*) nor in the hypostases (*uqnūm*)⁹⁰.

واعتقاد هذه الفرقة في الاتحاد أن الجوهرين على طباعهما، والأقنومين على طباعهما، ووقع الاتحاد في خاصة البنوة التي قرناها، وإنها معنى علم ذات البارئ بنفسه. فهذا الشخص المصطفى من السيدة شارك الإله في هذه الخاصّة، فصار منها مسيحًا واحدًا، ابنًا واحدًا، لا جوهر واحد ولا أقنوم واحد⁹⁰.

فهذه الحجج قد بان أنّ المسيح، من بعد الاتحاد، جوهران وأقنومان، ابن واحد. فالإتحاد إذن هو في البنوة، [لا] في الجوهر، ولا في الأقنوم⁹¹.

The interesting thing in this Christological approach is that Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib differs, in some way, from the traditional and official doctrine of his church; he does not mention the term "person" to express the uniqueness in Christ⁹². Even though Christ is one, the subject after the union is one Christ and one Son. There are, however, two united substances and two united hypostases in this one subject. So terminologically, he differs from his tradition, but the content is the same.

88) The translation is ours.

89) Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Al-Kalām fī al-ittiḥād*, p. 193 (ch. 8, par. 130).

90) The translation is ours.

91) Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Al-Kalām fī al-ittiḥād*, p. 197 (ch. 8, par. 152).

92) We arrived at the same conclusion regarding Elias of Nisibis. See, EBEID, *La Tuni-ca*, pp. 569-570.

one attribute, is one person, i.e., an individual, since it is a separated reality.

CONCLUSION

The metaphysical system is the basis for expressing the Christian faith in philosophical terms and concepts, that is, in dogmas. Different metaphysical systems, different definitions and comprehensions of the concepts and terms produce different ways for expressing the dogmas. Among the Antiochene thinkers and theologians, there was the use of an elaborated version of the Aristotelian metaphysical system regarding the substance and its kinds. This elaborated version began with the Cappadocians, namely Gregory of Nyssa who mixed Aristotle's and Stoicism's doctrines on the substances.

This Antiochene system consists of three kinds of nature: abstract nature (the species), concrete nature (singular and particular), and partial nature, i.e., nature in intermediate status (not abstract and not particular). We also find such division in some commentators of Aristotle, under a Stoic influence, which means that it was a current philosophical system⁹⁴. Babai the Great, in a decisive moment of his church, developed a metaphysical system that had as its basis the system circulating among the Antiochenes, with the purpose of defending the Christological doctrine of the two natures, two hypostases, and one person. His starting point, then, was Christological, and consequently he had to apply his system to the Trinitarian field.

Nature (*kyānā*) is an abstract reality, hypostasis (*qnōmā*) is a nature in intermediate status, i.e., it has the natural properties of the species to whom it belongs, however still not personalized. It is concrete reality and singular nature, but without specific properties which make it distinct from the other hypostases subject to the same common nature. This distinction is made by the person (*paršōpā*) that each hypostasis possesses, which is the group of the individual properties. According to this system, the divine nature is abstract reality; the three divine hypostases (*qnōmē*) are subject to this reality and manifest perfectly its natural properties. These three hypostases are distinct through the particular person (*paršōpā*) of each one, the group of the particular properties of each *qnōmā*. In the Christological field, Christ is two natures, i.e., two different substances. These natures are distinct through their natural properties that are manifested by the *qnōmā* of each one, and

94) Cf. TURCESCU, *Gregory of Nyssa*, p. 70.

because of this, the two realities are also two *qnōmē*, i.e., two distinct and different concrete natures. These two *qnōmē*, however, are personalized by the same *paršōpā*, i.e., the common *paršōpā* of filiation.

If for Babai the starting point was the Christological doctrine for which he developed his metaphysical system and then applied it to the Trinitarian field, for Ibn at-Ṭayyib, the starting point was the Trinitarian doctrine. He elaborated and modified Babai's system, applied it to his Trinitarian doctrine, and then came to use his new approach in the Christological field. We can say that Ibn at-Ṭayyib adopted Babai's system when he talks metaphysically, i.e., when he gives definitions for the metaphysical concepts. When he had to apply it, however, in Trinitarian and Christological doctrine, he had to make a modification, an elaboration and interpretation. While the theological and doctrinal content of both theologians was identical, that is, the faith of the Church of the East, the context of Ibn at-Ṭayyib was different: 1) we have the return of the discussion on the Trinity and also on the person of Christ; 2) we have a new language and a different philosophical lexicon. This element, in fact, was the reason behind the interpretation that Ibn at-Ṭayyib made of Babai's system.

Ibn at-Ṭayyib used the same basis as Babai, i.e., the doctrine regarding the three kinds of nature. He was able to accept such a division, since he was an Aristotelian philosopher and commentator, and since such a system was also adopted by other commentators of Aristotle. In addition, he was familiar with the use of this system by Babai. Ibn at-Ṭayyib, then, on the one hand, wanted to maintain the basis of the Cappadocians' doctrine, and on the other, he knew that Babai's system, with some modification, could be helpful in explaining the Trinitarian faith to Muslims. We understand this modification as an Aristotelian interpretation of Babai's system, and not simply an application of the Cappadocians' thought into Babai's system, since Ibn at-Ṭayyib approached the Cappadocians' doctrine through an Aristotelian reading.

The three divine *aqānīm*, then, are the composition of the divine essence with essential attributes that describe the common divinity. These three hypostases are not partial natures, since their attributes are specific; they manifest the inter-trinitarian relation. For this reason, Ibn at-Ṭayyib was able to affirm that the *aqānīm* describe the essence, and they are not three separated realities, that is, they are not three divinities. As a consequence, trying to avoid the accusation of being tritheistic, he did not apply the term person (*faršūf/šahṣ*) in his Trinitarian doctrine. The metaphysical function of this concept was given to the concept of property/attribute (*ḥāṣṣah/ṣifah*),

which is related to the hypostasis. In this way, he was able to say that the three Christian hypostases are three distinct essential attributes of God's one essence, and not three individuals or three singular separated divine substances.

From this starting point, he also modified the Christological doctrine by not calling the one Christ and Son "person" (*ṣaḥṣ*). Consequently, the union took place in the property of the filiation and not in the *parṣōpā* of the Son that was given to the human nature in Christ, as Babai teaches. That being so, the natures in Christ are two, and these two natures have one attribute, and are two hypostases (*aqānīm*). Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib was able to affirm that the union was between one *uqnūm*, the Son, and not the whole Trinity, with one single human being, i.e., one human *uqnūm*, which is person (*ṣaḥṣ*), that is, separated concrete nature.

In this way he could:

- 1) reply to Muslims and prove to them that the three *aqānīm* are essential attributes of God, and not three gods;
- 2) explain that there are differences between essential attributes and verbal ones;
- 3) maintain his ecclesiastical tradition of not using the term person in Trinitarian doctrine;
- 4) give the metaphysical function of person to the property;
- 5) apply, after this modification, Babai's system to the Cappadocians' doctrine with an Aristotelian approach;
- 6) avoid the accusation of tritheism by using the term "person" only in an anthropological doctrine; and
- 7) express the Christological faith of his church using this system.

Finally, we conclude by saying that the work of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib was more than a mere transmission of the doctrine of Babai or the Cappadocians, and was more than an elaboration of it or a simple modification. Rather, it should be considered a doctrinal and philosophical development within the Church of the East and Christian thought.

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